Mahamudra—The Method of Self-Actualization

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In the jungle of unknowing
Roam the deer of subject-object;
From the bow of action-and-appreciation
I shoot the arrow of reality.
There die the fictions of the mind;
I eat the meat of non-duality
And taste it as pure bliss—
This is Mahamudra realization.

—Śavaripa![1]

BUDDHISM not only professes to be a "middle" way but also emphasizes a "middle" view, which implies more than the mere avoidance of extreme judgements of eternalism and nihilism by which, in the Indian context, the two postulates of eternal existence *a parte ante* and eternal non-existence *a parte post* were indicated. "Middle" is a term for śūnyatā, the open dimension of Being, that becomes less open and vibrant with potentialities to the extent that the fictions and postulates of categorical thinking gain prominence. The "middle" view then is the ability to perceive this open dimension, which is ineffable in the sense that words, just like concepts, change it and turn it into something other than it is, something else *like* it and yet something different from *it* itself. Another aspect of the "middle" view is that in it the whole of the world is seen as a unity, a single rich live reality, which in no way implies a loss of ability to recognize the concrete. Let us take the perception of a painting. The moment we approach it by declaring it to be "realistic", "surrealistic" or otherwise, we have cut ourselves off from the possibility of seeing it in its uniqueness. Instead of seeing it we merely apply our classifications, comparisons, evaluations and other utilitarian purposes. In fact, we impoverish ourselves by taking the demands of categorical thinking as ultimates, rather than understanding them as symptoms or pressures towards fuller perception and appreciation. The "middle" view, which perceives that which is in its intrinsic uniqueness, is contrasted with "error" (tr'ül-pa, *'khrul-pa*) which means *not* to perceive some aspect, but merely to select one attribute, to reject others and to distort still others. Lastly, the "middle" view is a moment of highest happiness and fulfilment and it is with reference to such a great experience that the term "mahāmudrā" is used. To bring about this vivid

awareness is the aim of the various instructional methods that developed in course of time. However, it is not enough to have a vision of fulfilment, it is equally necessary to act on the basis of this vision, which means to be more perceptive in all one's dealings in life. It is here that the idea of the "way" reveals its meaning as a process of self-actualization which is inseparably connected with the "middle" view, just as the "middle" view is an incentive to self-actualization. In other words, "self-actualization" becomes an aid to full awareness and culminates in it; on the other hand, full awareness facilitates self-actualization. In the one case, the full vision of reality is still a more or less distant goal, in the other, we retrace our progress from the valley to the peak through the fullness of awareness. These two aspects are represented in the Sūtras and Tantras respectively.

> "Although there are many ways of dealing with mahāmudrā, two (are prominent) according to the division of (the texts into) Sūtras and Tantras. The latter (discuss) the (feeling) of bliss and radiancy as they develop out of empathy in one's being. This is the Mahāmudrā of Saraha, Nagarjuna, Naropa, Maitripa, the quintessence of the unsurpassable Tantras as taught in the 'realizations' and 'songs'. The former is the meditation on the open dimension of Being as taught in the prajñāpāramitas and allied literature."[2]

The openness of Being which is said here to be the content of the meditative practice, is not an utter blankness, but something that is vibrant with life, because paradoxically it is nothing and yet something, a presence which is not a presence *of* something. The attention to the openness of Being is similar to the perception of an aesthetic object whose richness is an infinitude of possibilities; and the aesthetic experience of it can be a continuous delight. The attention to this openness, which is usually termed "meditation", is actually an intense and searching way of looking. The highest form of excitement generated by this process is felt as bliss, by which we understand on the one hand the elimination of any distorting elements such as a limiting and classificatory concept or an emotion, and, on the other, the awareness of what there is as a unique instance. This is also the definition of Mahāmudrā by Pä-ma kar-po (*Padma dkar-po*):

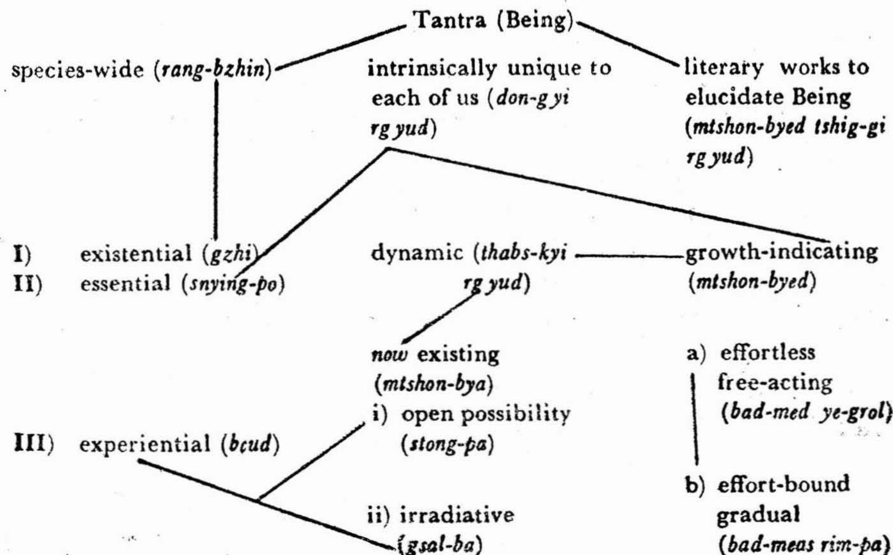
> "The openness of Being rich in most excellent potentialities is termed Mahāmudrā, because it offers unchanging bliss, in which there is complete elimination (of disturbances) and complete intrinsic awareness (of what there is)."[3]

The association of this bliss with radiancy is highly significant. Radiancy is an aspect of excitation in living organisms. In the highest form of pleasurable excitation we literally light up with pleasure, shine with joy, and glow with ecstasy. Such radiancy is most noticeable in the

sparkling of the eyes or in a glowing complexion. Actually, what occurs in what is described as "bliss and radiancy" is a revitalization of the whole person. This revitalization takes place when the facade of socially accepted behaviour, erected on the conflict between conscious and involuntary processes, i.e., the ego-image militating against bioenergetic responses, is demolished and a new structuring of personality emerges. It is for this reason that the Tantric aspect is associated with such persons as Saraha, Nāropa, Maitripa and others, all of whom belong to the group of mahāsiddhas whose life-style is reported to have been quite unconventional.

Bliss and radiancy as phenomena of excitation belong, properly speaking, to the "path" or process of self-actualization which is the capacity to hold and increase the level of excitation. The important point to note is that the "path" does not indicate a change from inertness to aliveness, like a machine when its motor is started, but is the ongoing process of life and growth, the expansion and extension of our being. Actually, the "path" only indicates one aspect of being and it is only a figurative way of dividing life into a ground or starting point, a path, and a goal. Life or man's being cannot be divided, although it may be looked at from different angles. One such way of looking at Being is the ontological approach, which is termed Tantra, another is the cognitive way, termed the "presence (i.e. being there) of mind", and still another one is the experiential way termed Mahāmudrā. Each of these technical terms needs clarification.

The most comprehensive analysis of the meaning of Tantra is given by Long-ch'en rab-jam-pa *(Klong-chen rab-'byams-pa)* and can be graphically represented as follows:[4]



From the diagram it becomes evident that apart from being a collective name for literary works dealing with the technique for integrating man's two fold nature (what he is and what he could be), Tantra essentially, is a name for this Being which is in part unique to him and in part species-wide, and which both *is*, that is, "natural", intrinsic, given, and *acts* in its actualization of itself. This explains the use of the term "self" in "self-actualization", which has nothing to do with the postulates of idealistic philosophy. Applied to man as a living being, rather than as an abstraction, this means that man, in so far as he is, wants to know *how* to live, and this desire to know at once determines the meaning he attributes to Being-as-such and to his particular being. In this desire to know, knowledge is not only presupposed but is even pre-existent, because this very desire is more concerned with the possibility of real knowing, unconditional being, than with postulates, conditional being and opinions about the latter's cognitions. In this respect absolute Being, that is, Being-as-such, and knowledge-as-such are synonymous; the one cannot be added to nor abstracted from the other. Regardless of how this cognitive absoluteness will manifest itself as this or that particular knowledge, it remains commensurate with the mystery of Being-as-such, determining the character of knowledge in each individual case. Since the word "knowledge" is ambiguous, and in order to avoid confusion, the term "intrinsic awareness" will be used when knowledge-as-such is implied. This leaves the term "knowledge" available for the various forms this "intrinsic awareness" may take: perception, judgement, "thought", or opinion. Not only do most indigenous texts distinguish between "intrinsic awareness" (rig-pa, *rig-pa*) and "thought" (sem, *sems*), the very definition of Tantra brings out this distinction and emphasizes its meaning of "existential presence" (nä-lug, *gnas-lugs*). Thus Long-ch'en rab-jam-pa says that.

> "The very fact (ngo-wo, *ngo-bo*) of being (gyü, *rgyud;* Tantra) is the great mystery of the presence of intrinsic awareness and its determining operation. It is pervasive and nothing can be added to nor subtracted from it."[5]

The presence of Being-as-such as intrinsic awareness at once determines its operational modes. That is to say, Being-as-such is not a static abstraction, but a function, and to function implies variability. As a living being, man, in his totality, is the instrument of experience regarding itself in its activity, "intrinsic awareness", and in this activity he exhibits certain action patterns which represent certain types of life-styles. Again it is Long-ch'en rab-jam-pa who brings out this "typology" and the persistence of such action patterns.

> "One speaks of Tantra because it indicates certain action patterns (rig, *rigs*); because it causes man to be born in one action pattern

or another; and because it is pervasive, without break and continuous."[6]

While in the technical sense the term Tantra refers to what we call Being-as-such, which is always present as man's actual being and cannot be taken away without denying man himself, the very fact that we are speaking of the fact of man's being indicates that a mental operation is taking place. However, in the same way that the fact of man's being does not imply that he is this or that particular type or being—for such is the manifestation of this fact in the proposition about it—so also the ongoing process of a mental operation does not imply that mind is merely this or that particular content of mind, through which Mind-as-such manifests itself. Just as pure fact is independent of all concepts and theories, while described fact is fact brought under concepts and, as a necessary consequence, under theory, which is then proposed in propositions of which it is possible to say that they are true or false, so also Mind-as-such is independent of all contents, although it makes them possible. In the history of thought it has unfortunately happened over and again that pure fact was confused with described fact and mind with the contents of mind, and most of what goes by the name of philosophy is devoted to the perpetuation of this confusion. Strictly speaking, we can say nothing about pure fact nor about Mind-as-such, since the moment we put in words what it is, we have described fact—have formulated an idea rather than merely observed or experienced. Nevertheless we can use words to denote it, provided we recognize these words as pointing to what we have to experience for ourselves and not as conveying fact. In other words, the very fact of man's being is his awareness of it, but this does not come with a tag on it saying "I am Saṃsāra" or "I am Nirvāṇa". Saṃsāra and Nirvāṇa are not empirically given distinctions. but interpretative designations.

"The presential fact of Being is not given as Saṃsāra or Nirvāṇa, because it does not change from the genuine fact of Mahāmudrā."[7]

Although, as has been previously noted, pure fact in itself is ineffable, all we immediately apprehend and observe are aesthetic qualities such as colours and sounds, fragrances and flowers, pains and pleasures, which certainly are not external physical objects; for a physical object is something that answers a set of postulations. Rather are they impressions and responses, though not in a mechanistic way. I respond to the beauty of the beloved person making a deep impression on me, but it is not the person, the three-dimensional object defined postulationally in terms of anatomy, physiology, chemistry and so on, but his or her "presence" which is alive with infinite, ineffable and indescribable potentialities. The moment I try to classify, to categorize, and to compare, the spell is broken and, quite

literally, "the light goes out". Note again the phenomena of radiancy, excitement, and being.

All human experience is intentional in structure—I cannot do without doing something and I cannot think without thinking about something. Concretely this intentional structure is manifested in the subject-object division. Here again it is important to distinguish between subject-as-such and object-as-such and not to confuse either with this or that particular subject and this or that particular object. Hence idealism which attempts to reduce the object to a state of the subject, and pan-objectivism which attempts to reduce the subject to an object, are both to be rejected as utterly inadequate accounts. The intentional structure of human experience, termed the "existential presence of mind (i.e. experience)" or "Mahāmudrā as ground or starting-point", is described as follows:

> "The letter-symbol A becomes E by having turned it into the locative case in order to (indicate the intentional structure of) the intuitive cognition of the open dimension of Being. Therefore the letter-symbol E refers to the discriminative-appreciative awareness of the ground of all and everything, which is itself characterized as an openness vibrant with infinite potentialities or (as an expansion like) the sky. The letter-symbol VAM refers to activity characterized as compassion, sublimeun changing bliss. As is cognition, so is activity, and as is activity, so is cognition. Their union is indicated by the symbol EVAM."[8]

The diction may be unfamiliar, but the sense is quite clear. The noetic act (discriminative-appreciative awareness) exists as an indeterminate relational form which is terminated by the object (in the sense of apprehendable fact) with which formal identification (A>E) is achieved. In this noetic act any quality may become its termination, the quality itself being a potentiality rather than a concrete (i.e. postulationally defined) entity. The noetic act itself is an excitatory process and is felt as pleasurable, and the intensity of pleasure expresses the kind and degree of inner excitation. Feeling (Pleasurable excitement) and thinking have a common origin in the bioenergetic process of the living individual, in his fact of being, and become antithetical only on the level of subjectivistic, i.e., ego-centred, consciousness. Intrinsic, aesthetic awareness which recognizes the validity of the object as unique, and unlike ordinary thinking does not subordinate the object to the demands of the subject, is therefore indissolubly permeated with feeling. To the extent that the cognitive process becomes divested of the restrictions imposed on it by the postulates of the theorizing mind and becomes capable of seeing what there is in its intrinsic uniqueness, validity, and impressiveness, not only does it grow in clarity, but there is also a corresponding intensity of pleasure. This heightened awareness, which is emotionally noninterfering and contemplative rather than forceful, is not incompatible with action,

rather it makes action meaningful and frees it from the ego-centred activism which overrides the validity of what there is, and distorts it for ends that become self-destructive. Contemplation is not an end in itself, but neither is it a means for other means. It is in moments of pure delight and of being intrinsically aware that man creates himself and his world, but this creativity has nothing in common with the manufacturing of more and more consumer goods. The unity of intrinsic awareness and pure delight, the one receptive-passive, the other creative-active, is pointed out by the symbol EVAM which as a symbol prevents the unity from being concretized into more postulates. Moreover, this unity of aesthetically perceiving and being feelingly active, is basic to human life, and its experience makes life worthwhile. We have seen that pure fact must be experienced in order to be known, and that any proposition about it detracts from its validity and desirableness. The experience itself is always felt as good and "pure", by which is meant that it needs nothing else, and that "evil" is the product of limited vision, the limitation being a "dirtying" influence. Turning then to described fact we can say that there is simultaneously present a manifestation (nang-wa, *snang-ba*) and an openness (tong-pa, *stong-pa*) in the sense that what is there is a presentation of a possibility, not a representation of something, and, because it is not the presence of a "thing", it is the openness of being. And in the response to this presence we are both cognitively appreciative and creatively active. This is summed up in the four attributes of Mahāmudrā as the foundation of man's being:

> "As fact it is independent of propositions and as activity it is pure; its intrinsic characteristic is the non-duality of appreciative awareness and creative activity."[9]

Translated into our language this passage means that the beginning of man's growth is the aesthetic experience which comes as a presentation and presence of potentialities and possibilities and which, on the one hand, makes a person more appreciatively disposed by combatting the ego's possessiveness, and, on the other, brings into action, in one form or another, the total being of the percipient.

The aesthetic experience, precisely because of its independence of presuppositions and propositions, serves the function of developing the capacities, the value range, and the personality of the individual. It proves a vision of human purpose in an ideal embodiment that can serve as a guide for both personal and group life, by changing things into what is intrinsically interesting and valuable. Viewed as function, the aesthetic experience, Mahāmudrā as ground, is referred to as Mahāmudrā as path, and "path" in Buddhist connotation, is synonymous with growing awareness (ye-she, *ye shes*), bringing into operation the cognitive capacity (she, *shes*) that has been there all the time (ye, *ye*). The change of things into the intrinsically valuable and interesting, which implies also a change of

oneself, is referred to by the term maṇḍala. The maṇḍala is, as it were, a blueprint for the change to be effected. It is presented as a pervasive pattern in which all formal elements have been integrated into a single complex whole, just as the threads in a tapestry, whose individual convolutions elude us, make the broad design of the tapestry itself seem perfectly clear. Or, as Long-ch'en rab-jam-pa[10] explains, it has a central theme that is enhanced by its surrounding elements.

The very idea of function implies valiability and the capability of serving a variety of individual and group needs and, in this service, of transcending all limitations. However since "transcending" may suggest an unwarranted transcendentalism it is better to speak of the functionality of Mahāmudrā as embracing a variety of functional relations, physical, emotional, cognitive, social, and so on. This is evident from Pä-ma kar-po's description:

> "Maṇḍala is the horizon of meaning, and (gana) cakra is the host of gods (acting) within it. The attention to such a conception and the attention to the Karmamudrā as a female providing transitory pleasure and to the Jñānamudrā as a female providing a (more lasting, though) unstable pleasure, may offer the attainment of the ultimate in desires, the Akaniṣṭha realm, but is unable to offer absolute satisfaction, because it is not yet independent of the desire to have (these experiences) concretized, and so merely turns into unknowing."[11]

Two concepts are introduced here, which have both aesthetic (perceptual) and social implications. Karmamudrā is not only a concrete woman but also a cognitive situation. This is evident from the definitions given. Nāropa[12] sees the Karmamudrā as a need-gratification and such a relationship limits and relates her to the perceiver's needs. We can use her, but do not necessarily appreciate her in her own right, and to the extent that she is merely used, she is interchangeable with other need-gratifying commodities. It is more difficult to perceive her as unique; but the transition from purposive perception to aesthetic perception is facilitated by insisting on the analogy character contained in "embodying" language which is characteristic of Tantric works. "Categorizing" language, the language we use in ordinary life, tries to "explain" by propounding propositions in which truths are affirmed or denied and which for the most part are merely excuses for phenomena that have not been understood. "Embodying" language, by contrast, attempts to express valuable experiences, while the general meanings of the "categorizing" language are not the important part of the "embodying" language, although both languages make use of the same linguistic material. Since the symbols used in "embodying" language have something of the material and "concrete" in them, it is very easy to misunderstand them as being "nothing but" concrete signs of the material.

That the Karmamudrā is also a cognitive situation, is clearly stated by Bhitakarma:

> "The reason for speaking of the awareness within (the situation presented by the Karmamudrā, which is itself an illustration, as an analogy, is that the discriminative-appreciative function refers to the analogy character of spontaniety. Since this function is (executed by) the Karmamudrā, the awareness engendered by her, derives from a number of conditions and approximates and comes close to love, it is set up intentionally and comes from a woman of the human world."[13]

In brief, through the discriminative-appreciative function we are able to perceive in a love-motivated way and can successfully overcome need-motivation. In this transition a new meaning is revealed, and this new meaning cannot but have a significant impact on the beholder. This impact is termed mudrā in Sanskrit and ch'ag-gya-[ma] (*phyag-rgya*-[*ma*]) in Tibetan.

Pä-ma kar-po explains the term as follows:

> "The term mudrā has the double meaning of 'to seal'
> and of 'not to go beyond?'."[14]

More exhaustive is Bhitakarma:

> "Ch'ag-gya has the meaning of 'sealing' and of 'not going beyond'. It means to seal bodily, verbal, and mental (acts) by spontaneity; to seal what is seen and heard by unoriginatedness; to seal this experience by non-mentation; and to seal the intentional character of the experience by devotion and compassion. The self-manifestation of bliss and openness does not pass beyond (its) non-duality."[15]

The last sentence in this quotation reiterates Mi-la rä-pa's (*Mi-la-ras-pa*) definition:

> "Ch'ag: the indivisibility of bliss and openness.
> Not to go beyond it: gya."[16]

Bhitakarma's description clearly points out that in aesthetic experience the whole being of the person who has this experience, is brought into action, and that this action is spontaneous rather than deliberate and forced. Spontaneity is characteristic of the creative life, which is not just a problem-solving or product-making quality. Spontaneity radiates throughout the person, and like radioactivity, hits all life. It is effortless, without a priori expectations about what ought to be there,

what must be there, or what has always been there. The world—"that which is seen and heard"—just *is* in aesthetic experience; it has not been originated by some transcendental hocus-pocus, nor is its experience contrived by "mentation" which is essentially the process of controlling, inhibiting, repressing and suppressing. The reaction to the world is one of "devotion and compassion". Devotion is the surrender of the ego before the experience which is felt as something great (mahā), and compassion is to feel in sympathy with the validity of what there is; compassion is the opposite of sentimentality, which is grounded in selfishness; and just as sentimentality is ego-centred, so is compassion other-centred, this other-centredness being indicated by the "intentional" character of the experience in the text quoted above.

Karmamudrā, which emphasizes karma as the passing delight in the physical contact with a woman, does not mean that the physical act is the main concern. The very use of the symbolic term Karmamudrā, instead of the blunt diction of a "woman", should put us on guard. Too often a symbol is misunderstood for a sign, but whether the images of experience are understood as signs or symbols is decisive for man's further development: either there is growth and fulfilment or there is repression and stagnation. As a situation Karmamudrā is descriptive, both of the within and the without. Both the within and the without are inextricably fused. The way in which the man sees the woman in the external world indicates the way in which he sees himself. Moreover, it is wrong to assume that a situation is something static; a situation is a momentary manifestation of the life process. Hence Karmamudrā serves as a function to transform, extend, and deepen man's awareness not only of himself but also of his place in nature. The attempt to express this adequately always fails, because that which is to be expressed can never be more than hinted at by the finite symbols of the phenomenal world. Therefore, to remain on the level of literalism, to see in the Karmamudrā nothing else but a woman's arousing man's sexual passion and possessiveness is both a disparagement and a misconception. The moment we seem to possess something it breaks in our hands, the pleasurable excitement drops to freezing-point if not below it.

Still it is through the Karmamudrā that we can widen our horizon, because she herself participates in a wider reality. In man's life, the woman is the unique opportunity he has to see something more than he usually cares to see. This wider reality is Dharmamudrā, or, as stated in other texts, Jñānamudrā, which is said to be the non-duality of bliss and openness. For it is through the delights culminating in ecstatic bliss that we give ourselves over to experience of openness. In this experience, whatever is seen has lost its postulational character of being something standing in contrast with, or being in direct opposition to, something else. To understand things vividly does not mean to obliterate something and to elevate something else into an eternal principle, but to accept and to appreciate whatever appears spontaneously and not to

concretize it. Therefore, both Karmamudrā and Dharmamudrā are ways of an individual's rediscovery and reassessment of his horizon of being. Even in taking the Karmamudrā as a sexually stimulating woman, in the narrowest sense of the word, the point is not to see in her merely an outlet for sexual impulses and passions, but to be aware of how it feels to be stimulated and responsive. In other words, while the Karmamudrā is basically the encounter with a physical woman, the Jñānamudrā (Dharmamudrā) is "the imaginary personification of the aesthetically appreciative and discriminative function, and lets us taste some fleeeting bliss through appearing radiantly in concentration"[17] or as Nāropa says:

> "Jñānamudrā is the creation of one's mind. She is of the nature of the Great Mother or other goddesses and comprises all that has been previously experienced. She is the impetus and sustaining power of pleasure in the realm of aesthetic forms (Rūpadhātu). . . ."[18]

The statement that "she" is a creation of one's mind does not mean that "she" is on the level of a product coming from an assembly-line. Creation here indicates a special kind of perceptiveness and what is perceived is a value, termed "the goddess". This, again, has nothing to do with the beliefs and stereotypes of organized religion which are the opposite of "openness to experience". In the Jñānamudrā situation the mind is able to see anew and afresh, and therefore lives more in the world of the real than in the world of deadening concepts and postulates. Similarly the term "personification" must not be understood in the sense in which it originated in the animistic theory of Anglo-French positivism. The Jñānamudrā does not wish to explain anything, it merely records how the experience comes to man in visible and intelligible forms. To call the appreciative function a goddess, and, by transference, to say that woman is a goddess incarnate, may be poetry. But poetry does not tell lies, it means what it says, but it does not always say all that it means. Poetry, like all other arts, is a special revelation of reality whose nature is determined by an awareness of value and its appreciation. However, the aesthetic experience, which is stronger in Dharmamudrā than in Karmamudrā, is not an end in itself. As far as the "object matter" is concerned, there is no difference between ordinary and aesthetic perception (the woman in our concrete world and the goddess in our imagination); but while ordinary perception is inhibitive and restricted to an immediate purpose, aesthetic perception has a liberating effect by letting all that is present in the object appear in the fullest and most vivid manner, thus enabling a more lively appreciation of the actualities of the object and preventing a distortion of the object by the impositions of subjective demands. The danger in aesthetic appreciation is that it may become an end in itself. That is to say, just as the Karmamudrā situation may result in the frustrating efforts of the pleasure-chaser, the compulsive collector

of physical contacts, who may have fun but never experiences pleasure, so the Jñānamudrā situation may end in an aestheticistic mood which tends to take the individual out of touch with reality. The aestheticistic mood incapacitates the individual for doing anything. Hence Pä-ma kar-po is correct in stating that the Dharmamudrā, too, is not the final answer to man's problem of becoming man and being man. It is true, that to the extent that we refrain from our customary categorizing, schematizing and classifying activity, we will be able to see and appreciate more and more aspects of the many-sidedness of a person or of a thing. But it is also true that when the initial perception is first of all a classification into useful or not useful, all subsequent perception becomes more and more empty. Once the object or person has been categorized and classified, it is simply no longer perceived. The poverty of the image shows up in repeated looking, as does its richness. The same holds good for the beholder. This ambiguity is evident in the concept of Śūnyatā which for some is an open ness vibrant with life (sarvākāravaropeta), while for others it is mere negativity (prasajyapratiṣedha). And while some see ever new potentialities in this openness, others cannot find anything and suffer the usual effects of the poverty of seeing, i.e. boredom and the proverbial blankness of mind. This negativism reflects the inability of the observer to see a person or a thing in any other way than through the system of classificatory concepts, and what eludes this classification is deemed to be quite literally nothing, so that again a classificatory concept has been set up. This process is not a non-classificatory perception which is characteristic of aesthetic perception, rather it contrasts thingness with nothingness as another kind of thingness, as is clearly pointed out by Pä-ma kar-po.[19]

The greater openness of the "Mahāmudrā as path", may be thought of as pure gratification and as an integrative process in which feeling and thinking attain functional identity in conjunction with the excitatory capacity of the living organism, all of which is referred to as the four qualities of Mahāmudrā as path:

> "Inexhaustible bliss, self-existing radiancy, a non-classificatory perception because as an unborn (fact) it is just there, and this (feeling of) bliss, the radiancy (of the alive person) and (his) non-classificatory (perception) form an indivisible unity."[20]

The way, as has been noted above, has its beginning in an immediately experienced fact of which we cannot say anything, except that we can draw attention to a presence which is both something as a presence and yet nothing by not being a presence *of* something. It is precisely because of this "something and nothing" that the way becomes meanigful as a program in the process of being carried out. The execution of the program obviously engages the whole of the individual who takes up his aesthetic envisionings in order to enact the passage from what he "is" (at this moment) in his life-world to what he "ought" or yearns to be

(at the next moment) in his life-world as someone-else-and-yet-the-same-himself. In other words, the way as man's growth resides in the fact that aesthetic purposing is a facet of his being and that it is the fountain and source of honesty and sincerity which are the hallmark of personality. The concept of personality is too often associated with exclusiveness, separateness, and insularity because the fact is overlooked that purposing activity, "travelling the path", is both self-formative and world-formative. It is all-comprehensive and its inclusiveness resides in its absolute uniqe-ness. The form-giving act gives form to everything at once, just as the light of the sun reveals everything at noce without calculated distinction of real and unreal. The way as aesthetic purposing renews human existence, provides fresh vision, and releases man from his fragmentation into the many roles he plays with a remarkable dexterity in keeping separate what is inseparable. In releasing man from his dividedness against himself, aesthetic purposing does not place him in another groove but increases the range of his sensory and imaginative grasp, enlarges the scope and subtlety of feelings and insight, and this makes for decent moral action. We act largely on the basis of what we sense and imagine, of what we feel and think, of what we value and cherish. The fact that the renewal of human existence is both self-forming and world-forming must not be interpreted to mean that it is vague, on the contrary it has both individuality and generality. Personality, as the Buddhist texts declare, is the fruition (phala) of Being-as-such on the human level. It is a poss-ibility actualized as further possibility, carrying within itself all of its associated potentialities. As a matter of fact, aesthetic purposing, becom-ing a personality, even "being personal", are never neutral happenings, the "cause" of which lies outside them; they are a disclosure and an-nouncement, and as such are never merely "private". Still, personality has to be enacted on its own account, "disinterestedly", "privately", before it can become available to anyone, and be entered into as if into one's own life. But this availability must not be understood as suggesting imitation. Van Gogh's self-mutilation is well-known, but if anyone of us were to cut off his ear he would not *eo ipso* become a Van Gogh. The imitator, the respectable representative of conformism, not only reduces the task of growing up and becoming a man, the "ought" of ethics, to a mere description of a liveless thing, the "is" of everyday occurrence, but also closes his eyes to the fact that his very being is not a thing at all, but a particular availability of capacities to know and to act, a pressure towards fuller and fuller being, towards greater and greater actualization of his humanity. In this context the analogy of the seed becomes most appropriate, because it repudiates the view, still held in certain circles, that man is "fully determined by forces external to the person." Actually, the environment does not give him potentialities and capacities, he has them already within himself. Environment can merely further or retard the growth, just as a gardener can help or obstruct a sun-flower to grow, but he can never implant the ability to grow into a sun-flower, into its

seed. (The mechanistic view overlooks the reciprocity of life-processes. An opinionated person literally poisons the whole atmosphere and the latter has a further poisoning effect upon the former. By contrast, a person with insight makes the world a better place to live in and such a world stimulates him to deepen his insight still further.) This pre-existent potentiality is prior to good and evil and its development does not make it either "good" or "evil", but lets it function fully. "To be at one's peak" is to be more oneself, though not in an egotistic sense since egotism is the tacit admission of frustration due to lack of insight, while to be more oneself is to perceive reality more fully and with less emotional contamination than when it is perceived by us ordinary persons. It is through the greater sensitivity and clearer perception of the person who is more himself, that we others may get a better report of what reality is like. To be more oneself is technically known as Dharmakāya, and what is conveyed through being oneself is termed Rupakāya which consists of Sambhogakāya and Nirmānakāya.[21] The former is "empathetic being" through which we feel with being, this feeling manifesting itself in the radiancy that shines from the person who is more himself and hence more alive and who through his presence can make us "feel good", more ourselves. The latter is "manifest being" which again is a presence in the sense of being both something and nothing and which acts as a potent stimulus to come closer to our own being.

Pä-ma kar-po speaks of this presence for self-actualization as follows:

> "From the seed, Mahāmudrā as ground, in which action and appreciation do not form a duality, (there grows a two-branched stem); the branch of discriminative-appreciative awareness thoroughly cleanses Saṃsāra and the branch of compassion cleanses Nirvāṇa and so leads to a Nirvāṇa that is not localized anywhere. Although the growing stem is presented as two, it cannot be split since it has grown as the (unitive) nature of openness and compassion, and because of the similarity to a seed, (the text speaks of the seed) so (the fruit). The reason is that according to these two (branches) the fruit seen in itself may be said to be the absolutely real in itself, while seen from the point of view of what is conveyed by it to others, it may be said to be the relatively real. Although a differentiation is made in view of its appearance in a double aspect, none can ever be separated from the other. Hence this arrangement of ground, path, goal is termed relativity, just as the magician is part and parcel of the magic show."[22]

What Pä-ma kar-po points out is of utmost importance for understanding what is meant by Mahāmudrā. First of all, he speaks of a self-regulatory process which in terms of causality indicates a hierarchically interrelated causation, rather than a mechanistic one in the manner of

billiard balls pushed from outside. The other is the relationship between absoluteness and relativity, or, on the individual level, between the private being and the public representation. Ground-path-goal are all relative to something else and this is absoluteness. Similarly, Sambhogakāya and Nirmānakāya are relative to each other, but their relativity is not relative to something else, and this fact is Dharmakāya.

Just as it is impossible to "define" Dharmakāya without destroying its absoluteness, i. e. reducing it to some other relative item, so also is it impossible to "define" Mahāmudrā without destroying its all-encompassingness. As absolute being it is described as "unborn", because only some kind of being can be said to have come into existence, but to attribute some being to Mahāmudrā would contradict its very being. Also, we cannot escape from being nor can we have a separate being from being. This is indicated by the statement that mudrā means "not to go beyond". Being is nowhere else than where it is. It is in everything aesthetically appreciated, be it the sky, earth, flowers, sea, ourselves or another person. It is the Mahāmudrā experience that restores to all that is its aesthetically rich and luminous quality, and its dignity of being.

Mahāmudrā is not a theory about some proposed being but is the attempt to give an account of how Being-as-such is experienced in and as becoming. Since its experience is Being-as-such, it is spoken of as "great" (mahā), and since it is an impressive encounter it is termed mudrā in the double sense of "impressing" and of "not getting away from" Being. As Gam-po-pa (*sGam-po-pa*) sums up:[23]

> "Mahāmudrā has four characteristics: (i) it is all-encompassing; (ii) it has no form but is the fact of being aware; (iii) it is time itself; and (iv) it does not come or go. A person in whom this experience is present, does not believe in the rejection of Saṃsāra; he does not believe in Nirvāṇa as rest; he has neither expectation nor fear about the outcome (of his striving); and he does not concretize Being-as-such."

Resumé

Mahāmudrā is a term for a peak experience, it is not itself a philosophical trend. Its realization begins with the immediacy of vision, the moment before what is seen is distorted by concepts; and in this respect the starting-point has similarities with aesthetic or intrinsic perception. Such a perception is an open

possibility offering new ways of development leading to the integration of personality. Consequently Mahāmudrā is both an integrated and integrating experience which is more open to spontaneity and expressiveness. Through the Mahāmudrā experience man creates himself and the world afresh. The experience itself cannot be expressed in words, but some of its aspects can be dealt with from an epistemological point of view, which is the method of the Sūtras, or from an existential or ontological point of view, which is the method of the Tantras.

notes & references

1. "Grub-thob brgyad-cu rtsaibzhi'i rtogs-pa'i snying-po rdo-rje'i glu", fol. 2a; "Grub-thob brgyad-cu rtsa bzhi'i do-ha 'grel-bcas", fol. 7b.

2. "dGe-ldan bka'-brgyud rin-po-che'i phyag-chen rtsa-ba rgyal-ba'i gzhung-lam" by the First Panchen Lama, Blo-bzang chos-kyi rgyal-mtshan, fol. 2a.

   Dharmabhadra dpal bzang-po in his commentary, the "Zab-lam phyag-rgya chen-po'i rtsa-ba rgyal-ba'i gzhung-lam-gyi steng-nas zab-'khrid gnang skabs-kyi zin-bris 'khrul-pa kun-sel", explains on fol. 3a. the difference between the Sūtra Mahāmudrā and the Tantra Mahāmudrā as follows: "The presence (*gnas-lugs*) of all that is, śūnyatā as such, is Māhamudrā as objective situation (*yul*); the one-flavouredness (of experiencing this situation in such a way that) not the slightest trace of duality impedes (the experience) because one has been accustomed through blissful awareness to this objective situation, is Mahāmudrā as owner of the objective situation (*yul-can*). Śūnyatā as a presence encompasses all that is and since both objective situation and owner of the objective situation represent the actuality of this śūnyatā, the manifold (world of appearance) has the one flavour (of śūnyatā) and the one flavour (of śūnyatā) is manifested in the manifold (world of appearance). Therefore, this indivisibility (of the one and the many), similar to water poured into water, is the Sūtra Mahāmudrā. Moreover, when one savours the taste of sugar and milk, on the intellectual level, each may seem to have a distinct flavour, but since it is impossible to say in so many words that this is the sweetness of sugar and that the sweetness of milk, (so also the Mahāmudrā experience) defies all verbalization.—The indivisibility of bliss (*bde sukha*) and openness of Being (*stong*; śūnyatā), similar to the indestructability of a diamond, is the Tantra Mahāmudā." In our terminology this means that the Sūtra Mahūmudrā emphasizes the epistemological aspect, while the Tantra Mahāmudrā emphasizes the "existential" or ontological aspect of a peak experience.

   On fol. 6a Dharmabhadra dpal bzang-po explains the "realizations" as the following seven works, "Tattvasiddhi" by Śāntirakṣita, "Prajñopāyaviniścayasiddhi" by Anañgavajra, "Jñānasiddhi" by Indrabhūti, "Advayasiddhi" by Lakṣmīmkarā, "Śrī-Sahajasiddhi" by Dombi Heruka, "Śri-Uḍḍiyāna-vinirgata-guhya mahāguhyatattvopadeśa" by Darikapa, and "Vyaktabhavānugatattvasiddhi" by

Sahajayoginī Cintā, and the "songs" as three cycles of Dohas by Saraha. On these see H.V. Guenther, *The Royal Song of Saraha. A Study in the History of Buddhist Thought*. University of Washington Press. Seattle and London, 1969.

3. "Jo-bo Naropa'i khyad-chos bsre-'pho'i gzhung-'grel rdo-rje- 'chang-gi dgongs-pa gsal-bar byed-pa" by Padma dkar-po, fol. 86b. (In the following this text will be abbreviated as A).

4. "Theg-pa'i mchog rin-po-che'i mdzod", fol. 60b seq. (In the following this text will be abbreviated as Thg).

5. Thg 60b.

6. *ibid.*, *rigs* is a term of many meanings. It also refers to a person's life-style.

7. "Jo-bo Naropa'i khyad-chos bsre-'pho'i khrid rdo-rje'i theg-par brgod-pa'i shing-rta chen-po", fol. 61b. (In the following this title will be abbreviated as B).

8. A fol 58b.

9. "bSre-'pho'i lam-skor-gyi thog-mar lam dbye-bsdu", fol. 119a. (In the following this title will be obbereviated as C).

10. Thg fol. 101a.

11. A fol. 61a.

12. "Sekoddeśaṭīkā", p. 56.

13. "Mudrā-catura-ṭīkā-ratna-hṛdaya" (bsTan-'gyur, rGyud-'grel vol. Mi, fol. 332b of the Peking edition).

14. "Phyag-rgya chen-po'i man-ngag-gi bshad-sbyar rgyal-ba'i gan-mdzod", fol. 26a. (In the following this title will be abbreviated as D).

15. "Mudrā-catura-ṭīkā-ratna-hṛdaya," fol. 326a.

16. D fol. 25b.

17. A fol. 86b.

18. "Sekoddeśaṭīkā," p. 56.

19. A fol. 61a.

20. C fol. 119b.

21. Dharmakāya *(chos-sku)* is a term for man's absolute existential value and the very fact of his being. (In Tantrism fact and value are inseparable, only described fact and postulated value can be separated from each other). As an absolute existential value Dharmakāya underlies and gives sustenance to man's feeling of his relationship to life as an individual. His positive feeling towards life is termed Sambhogakāya *(longs-sku)* and his value as an individual is termed Nirmanakāya *(sprul-sku)*. As facets of absolute value and being both Sambhogakāya and Nirmanakāya share in Dharmakāya as its manifestation (Rūpakāya). Their interrelationship can be shown graphically as follows:

    Dharmakāya =absolute, intrinsic value
    Rūpakāya =manifest extrinsic value as
    Sambhogakāya=empathetic value
    Nirmanakāya =(re) presentative value

22. B fol. 9ab.

23. sGam-po-pa, "Collected Works", vol. Sa, fol. 10b.